



Understanding pesticides

By definition, all pesticides are toxic.
But if used correctly, they help maintain the balance of nature.

Pesticides play a unique role in environmental protection. Contradicting the usual preventive approach, pesticides are toxic by design and deliberately released into nature. This paradox is explained by the fact that pesticides – when used properly – protect people and their environment from pests – animal, plant or microbial – that threaten human health and the balance of nature. Indeed, nature created the first chemical pesticides, produced by some plants and animals to repel their natural enemies. Over time, people have observed, adapted, and improved upon natural pest management.

Like most human endeavors, the beneficial use of pesticides depends upon information and sound judgment. Scientific knowledge of pesticides continually evolves and improves. California has embraced a scientific approach in developing the strictest and most comprehensive pesticide regulation program in the nation.

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) is the state's lead authority for pesticides. DPR has received national and international recognition for its work. While all pesticides must legally receive federal approval before use, DPR requires its own review and registration process to meet higher California standards.

Once a pesticide is approved, DPR and the County Agricultural Commissioners enforce the nation's most stringent pesticide laws. Due to the size and diversity of California agriculture, DPR relies on a close working relationship with the commissioners. They serve as local enforcement agents for state pesticide laws and regulations, and they are integrally involved in many DPR programs. For example, the commissioners issue site-specific permits required before many pesticides can be used, and they conduct inspections of pesticide applications.

In addition to supervising these local enforcement programs, DPR monitors pesticides – from the farm field to the grocery shelf – to assure the safety of workers and consumers. As a final step, DPR continuously re-evaluates its programs, emphasizing risk reduction and, whenever possible, less use of pesticides in favor of more natural pest controls.